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## The People of New Jerusalem

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## **The people of New Jerusalem:**

### **Narratives of Social In- and Exclusion in Rotterdam after the Blitz of 1940**

Stefan Couperus (University of Groningen)

#### ***Introduction***

We want to live, we want to build we – particularly we from Rotterdam! – want to work, we want to take it on immediately. We want to get back on our legs, we want to create, and to create something good, we long for ‘quality’ since we don’t accept less. And that’s why we want to build a very good, new Rotterdam, and we have to do that together, we, people of Rotterdam. Our city will be our own work. It will not be worse or better than what our own capacities, devotions and good will are able to establish.<sup>1</sup>

This quote, from an explanatory brochure (1946) dedicated to the reconstruction plan of Rotterdam, invokes an alleged collective spirit of perseverance and resilience. Rotterdam was one of many European cities that needed to be rebuilt after the devastating aerial bombardments (Blitzes) during the Second World War. The Blitz of 14 May 1940 and the subsequent (unintended) destructions by allied bombs (1943) and German sabotage strategies

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<sup>1</sup> Adviesbureau Stadsplan Rotterdam, *Het nieuwe hart van Rotterdam: Toelichting op het basisplan voor den herbouw van Rotterdam* (Rotterdam: Nijgh & Van Ditmar, 1946), 7. All translations from Dutch are my own unless stated otherwise.

in the port districts (1945) made Rotterdam continuously prone to debates about its redevelopment during and after the war. The quoted brochure, published under the aegis of the local authorities, was one of many texts that linked the future of Rotterdam to the resilience and agency of its people. It should, however, not be read exclusively as an instance of encouragement or stimulus couched in the turgid language of post-catastrophic, collectivist propaganda. First and foremost, the quote, and other texts as well, should be interpreted as a discursive practice aimed at generating public legitimacy for the dirigist planning practices that were employed by the mandated reconstruction authorities.

The fallow planes of the pulverised former inner cities proved to be projection screens par excellence on which images of the rationalised harmonious city were put on display by the agents of the reconstruction authorities. In its very essence, the reconstruction of Rotterdam was a top-down process, conducted by officials, administrators, architects and planners who had but one goal: to organise the city according to the perceived logics of their modernist visions of urban society.<sup>2</sup>

This paper wants to question this politico-administrative technology and its manifestations during the 1940s and 1950s. It will claim that behind the inclusionist intent – “we, people of Rotterdam” – one can observe a normative agenda of social inclusion and – with emphasis – an agenda of social exclusion as well. Two overarching narratives will be key to this analysis. These two core narratives, which can be discerned in many variations and guises during the post-Blitz years, gave meaning and expression to realities of, on the one

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<sup>2</sup> Cor Wagenaar, “Wederopbouw. Idee en mentaliteit,” *Een geruisloze doorbraak: De geschiedenis van architectuur en stedenbouw tijdens de bezetting en de wederopbouw van Nederland*, ed., K. Bosma and C. Wagenaar (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 1995), 225-231; Koos Bosma, “Het politiek-organisatorisch kader,” *Een geruisloze doorbraak: De geschiedenis van architectuur en stedenbouw tijdens de bezetting en de wederopbouw van Nederland*, ed., K. Bosma and C. Wagenaar (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 1995), 231-241.

hand, highly normative social inclusion in the post-war urban society and, on the other hand, implacable social exclusion from the soon-to-be-resurrected city of Rotterdam.

The local consequences of aerial warfare between 1940 and 1945 were immense for Rotterdam. Just some cold figures: over 1200 people were killed by aerial bombing, many thousands were wounded, approximately 28.000 dwellings were destroyed, hundreds of factories and shops were demolished, and, taken together, nearly 100.000 people (a sixth of Rotterdam's population) in total lost their homes during the war.

This context of destruction, human loss, spatial emptiness, ruptured social and spatial fabrics provides the backdrop of two emerging narratives about post-war and future Rotterdam. The first narrative will be referred to as the New Jerusalemist narrative. In brief, this narrative frames the city of Rotterdam as a hub to the world, a city whose fabric is shaped by human productivity, modernist planning, family life and welfare determinism; it depicts Rotterdam as the New Jerusalem in the making. The second narrative – or set of narratives – is rather difficult to subsume in one metaphor or term. Its narrators are to be found among the victims of the Blitz, the former inhabitants of the old inner city. They became the unhappy recipients of dirigist, top-down post-war urban planning practices. This minority group narrated a tale of post-war Rotterdam that invoked a rather insular imagery of a different Rotterdam.

This chapter does not employ a systemic narratological inquiry into the urban narratives that accompanied the resurrection of post-war Rotterdam. Rather this contribution intends to lay bare, first, the exclusionist impact of a perceived inclusionist narrative of New Jerusalem with its semantics of social equality, harmony and inclusion, and, second, it addresses the marginalised narrative of post-war reconstruction which fostered alternative practices of place-making and community-building among an ostracised social minority with limited visibility and voice in the city's political and cultural archive.

### *New Jerusalemism in Rotterdam*

Before elaborating on what is here dubbed the New Jerusalemist narrative that emerged after the Blitz of May 1940, a brief excursion into the specific discursive appreciations of Rotterdam is necessary to understand how negative connotations of the modern city gradually transformed into positive ones and vice versa. A frequent reminder of the repudiation which accompanied the city's transition from a regional centre of trade into an industrialised port city of global transit trade, is a single line from a poem by the progressive author E.J. Potgieter from 1879: "O, ugly, ugly art thou, industrial, new Rotterdam."<sup>3</sup> This phrase reflects a clear hesitance towards the enormous infrastructural and physical aggrandizement provoked by an ever increasing growth of activity in Rotterdam's port around the fin-de-siècle. Infused by new intellectual and cultural orientations in architecture and the visual arts (film!), the interwar period witnessed an inversion of this mode of 'city hating', as Patricia van Ulzen convincingly argues.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of cultivating a local nostalgia, a group of prominent authors, architects and artists represented the new Rotterdam, whether as a whole or by focusing on single landmarks such as new buildings or bridges, as a showcase of a globalised urban development leading towards the twentieth century metropolis. Famous expressions of this kind of cityboosterism are films by Joris Ivens (*The Bridge* 1928, about a new hydraulic bridge) and Andor von Barsy (*Rotterdam. The city that never rests* 1928, inspired by Walther Ruttmann's cinematic documentary about modern Berlin, *Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* from 1927). The popular magazine *Groot Rotterdam* (Big Rotterdam, 1923-1940) depicted all sorts of metropolitan

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<sup>3</sup>Quoted in: Paul van de Laar, *Stad van formaat: Geschiedenis van Rotterdam in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia van Ulzen, *Dromen van een metropool: De creatieve klasse van Rotterdam, 1970-2000* (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 2007), 47-63.

landmarks linking up Rotterdam's future with, for instance, one of the paragons of the interwar metropolis, Chicago.<sup>5</sup>

Underneath these celebrations of Rotterdam's (envisaged) achievements in modernism slumbered a growing dissatisfaction with the perceived anachronisms and irrationalities of the historical city centre.<sup>6</sup> The major part of Rotterdam was seen as an impediment to rationalizing motorised traffic, to separating urban functions in space, to ameliorating the social conditions of the urbanites, and to reconfiguring socio-spatial relations for the benefit of modernist town planning. When confronted with the prevailing urban realities, many urban visionaries saw their imaginations of metropolitan Rotterdam being thwarted by the tenacious juridical, social and spatial legacies of the ancient régime. Within the prevailing (democratic) polity, no interventionist arrangement capable of erasing old relations of (land) ownership, of clearing slums and of restoring alleged fading community bonds was conceivable.

The destructive impact of aerial raids offered radical new options for modernist urban reformers who became frustrated with the limitations of the existing city. After the fires were extinguished, the dust had settled on the inner city ruins and the horrifying experiences of death and destruction were gradually superseded by the daily urgencies of survival, advocates of modernist reform were far from reticent about the possibilities the new fallow plains – a planners' *tabula rasa* – offered for the redevelopment of Rotterdam. Wartime experience and destruction invested the interwar modernist discourse with urgency as Rotterdam wanted to catch up with the post-war economic order and sustain its ambition of being one of Europe's (trading) hubs to the world, a city arising from the smouldering debris which would epitomise the demands and needs of the modern era.

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<sup>5</sup> Van Ulzen 58-59.

<sup>6</sup>For the wider phenomenon of 'city hating' during the interwar period see: Christopher Klemek, *The transatlantic collapse of urban renewal: Postwar urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Recent inquiries into the conceptions of the Blitzed cities of Europe have revealed that a widely shared idea existed about post-Blitz redevelopment as a window of opportunity, or, to put it more bluntly, “a blessing in disguise”.<sup>7</sup> Bombs had proven to be the most effective means to remove old arrangements which had allegedly hindered urban reform for decades: alleys, slums, property rights, old industries and social misfits inhabiting the city centre. This sentiment surely applied to the Rotterdam case. As one prominent architect wrote in 1946: “Do you realise, people of Rotterdam, that many of the most precious memories about what has been lost during those days in May [the bombardments in 1940, SC], are, from a sensible perspective, clustering around the shortcomings of our old city?”<sup>8</sup> Similar appeals to contain sentiments of nostalgia and judge the disappeared city on its ‘true’ merits are to be found among many post-war architects and planners.

The old needed to be replaced by something new, something that marked the era of the New Jerusalem-in-the-making. In the context of post-war reconstruction, the term ‘New Jerusalem’ was coined as one of the main metaphors of emerging British post-war welfare statism, employed by the then ruling Labour Party under prime minister Clement Attlee.<sup>9</sup> However, the label of New Jerusalem has become a familiar urban signifier among

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<sup>7</sup>Jörn Düwel and Niels Gutschow, “Community and town planning: Debates of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,” *A blessing in disguise: War and town planning in Europe 1940-1945*, ed. Jörn Düwel and Niels Gutschow (Berlin: DOM Publishers, 2013), 14-51.

<sup>8</sup>Adviesbureau Stadsplan Rotterdam 10.

<sup>9</sup>Vernon Bogdanor, *From New Jerusalem to New Labour: British prime ministers from Attlee to Blair* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Andrew Davies, *To build a New Jerusalem: The British Labour Party from Keir Hardy to Tony Blair* (London: Abacus, 1996).

reconstruction historians, hinting at a host of cultural and political expressions with regard to post-Blitz redevelopment in mid-twentieth century European cities.<sup>10</sup>

‘New Jerusalem’ also entails narrative elements which hark back to its biblical semantics: it is the final destination of God’s people after the Last Judgment whereas non-believers and sinners would face “the outer darkness [where] there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”.<sup>11</sup> It is not difficult to equate the Last Judgment with the Blitzes of the Second World War and their social implications: only those fitting in the new, post-war template of the perfect urbanite were allowed in – the unfit were to be refused without remorse. This plot is surely traceable in post-Blitz Rotterdam. A rapidly emerging New Jerusalemist narrative of the city’s resurrection and regeneration presented a spatial and social imagery of the new metropolis. This imagery emanated a highly inclusionist ambition for Rotterdam’s inhabitants, but, as will become clear, also implied a normative social politics that generated practices of social exclusion and displacement.

Parallel to the emerging plans with regard to the physical space of the city e.g. high rises, broad traffic lanes, modernist architecture, radical rearrangements of the urban grid), which predominate the reconstruction literature and historiography, normative postulations about the social qualities of the urbanite strongly resonated in Rotterdam’s New Jerusalemist narrative. In fact, through new planning categories such as the neighbourhood unit and the standardised family dwelling, the social was inextricably entwined with modernist architecture and town planning. Thus, a preconception of the social, particularly within the urban context, preceded the modernist trademarks of post-war Dutch planning and

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<sup>10</sup>Tristram Hooley, *Visions of a New Jerusalem: Predictive fiction in the Second World War* (Leicester: PhD thesis University of Leicester, 2002); Nick Hayes, “An ‘English war’, Wartime Culture and ‘Millions like us’,” *‘Millions like us’? British Culture in the Second World War*, ed. Nick Hayes and Jeff Hill (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 1-32 (17).

<sup>11</sup>King James Bible, Cambridge Version, Revelation 3:12 and Matthew 22:13.



architecture, as a group of architects had already acknowledged in 1944: “Architecture and town planning are nothing but reflections of the community. At present, we are convinced that knowledge and skills are not sufficient to fulfill our building task. Healthy societal relations have to lay the vital foundations for that task.”<sup>12</sup> Notions about the nuclear family and the family’s course of life were at the very heart of designs of, for instance, the standardised single-family dwelling, the *eengezinswoning*. The ethos of architects shifted from the primacy of design to the primacy of society, as one professor in architecture decreed to his students in 1947: “we all have the duty to strive for a better, humane society, with all the powers of our heart and mind.”<sup>13</sup>

To understand the agendas of social exclusion underpinning the New Jerusalemist narrative in Rotterdam, at least four interrelated spheres can be distinguished within which the qualities of the ideal post-war urbanite are prescribed. The first sphere entails the socio-spatial orientation toward the city’s inhabitants and found its clearest expression in the propagation of the neighbourhood unit, a strictly planned decentralised residential zone whose organisation revolved around the nuclear family as the main living unit. The second sphere centres on the consumerist imperative that profoundly informed the socio-cultural agenda of Rotterdam’s reconstruction. Thirdly, the productive virtue of each urbanite (i.e. [industrial] labour) is to be found in the prominent post-war discourse about the city’s socio-economic ambition as a global port city. Fourthly and finally, and to a large extent interwoven in the New Jerusalemist narrative as a whole, is the dimension of the perceived social and gendered

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<sup>12</sup>Quoted in: Willem van Tijen, *Gronden en achtergronden van woning en wijk: Een bijdrage tot het ‘herstel; van de ‘vernieuwing’ op het gebied van het wonen* (Amsterdam: Van Saane, 1955), 52.

<sup>13</sup> J.F. Berghoef, *Over de architectonische vorm en zijn betekenis: Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar aan de Technische Hogeschool te Delft, op woensdag 15 oktober 1947* (Amsterdam: Van Saane, 1947), 24.

logic of the (reproductive) nuclear family as the basic cell of the harmonious urban community.

### ***Building the urban community of Rotterdam***

All four spheres and their concomitant prescriptive social templates are to be found in a great number of texts and images which were produced or induced by a set of actors that stemmed from the milieu of administrators, planners, architects and entrepreneurs who found themselves at the heart of the governance cluster engaged in Rotterdam's reconstruction, and commissioned filmmakers, writers, playwrights and artists. To them the New Jerusalemist narrative was a vehicle to legitimise the reconstruction plans publicly. Lacking the practice of public consultation and debate – let alone plebiscitary references –, as was the case in many Blitzed cities in Britain, it was a means to communicate with Rotterdam's citizens, who, to a large extent, were defined as the mere inhabitants, end-users one might argue, of the new metropolis.<sup>14</sup>

One significant topos in the New Jerusalemist discourse was the so called *wijk* or *wijkgedachte* (neighbourhood unit). The neighbourhood unit was coined by the American sociologist and planner Clarence Perry in the late 1920s, and was gradually adopted in various urban planning contexts also across the Atlantic. In the particular case of Rotterdam, the neighbourhood unit was debated amongst architects and planners during the war, before it became publicly known and recognised as a widely endorsed urban planning instrument by means of which one was able to create and maintain decentralized socio-spatial units which constituted the residential areas of the city. These units (*wijken*), on the one hand, provided

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<sup>14</sup> Susanne Cowan, *Democracy, Technocracy and Publicity: Public Consultation and British Planning, 1939-1951* (Berkeley: PhD thesis University of California, 2010).

for a set of amenities and services (e.g. schools, churches, parks, sports accommodations, leisure centres) allowing them to be autonomous urban entities outside of the city centre. On the other hand, the *wijken* were part of a much replicated depiction of the concentric city, a model which represented the interrelated social spheres of urban life, ranging from the family home, the street, the neighbourhood unit, to the city centre and the city as a whole.

In terms of social profiling, the neighbourhood unit generated a clear-cut generational conception of the urban community. Standardised dwellings, divided over the *wijk*'s territory according to an algorithmic pattern, would accommodate urbanites in the various, predefined stages of family life young couples without children, families with children and the elderly. The same applied to the use of the *wijk*'s facilities; the use of designated public space was linked to the different generations of co-existing families –babies and toddlers only needed a simple playground whereas older children had to live closer to the schools, sports grounds and the various youth centres. The premises of the apartments for the elderly included social meeting centres and grocer's stores.

The envisaged social pattern that would determine the make-up of the urban community is key to the narratives that were employed by neighbourhood unit advocates. These narratives had two aspects in common. The textual parts were phrased in a rather simple language, reducing the complexities of Rotterdam's urban history to episodes of stasis, decay and regeneration – the latter stage of course being fuelled by the marvels of neighbourhood-planing and community-building. The visual parts of the publications, whether magazines, brochures, booklets or posters, were abundant, colourful and eye-catching. Most images included artistic impressions of what the neighbourhood units – or at least parts of them – would look like after completion. The depictions of the neighbourhoods also included the nuclear family – man, wife and child(ren). Sometimes they would contemplate the new neighbourhood, their soon-to-be home. In other cases the neighbourhood

and the family are connected through a concentric model which suggests the socio-spatial logic of their inevitable convergence.

The brochure *Wij en de wijkgedachte* (1946), which was aimed directly at the citizens of Rotterdam, illustrates this evocatively. In a richly illustrated historical narrative, the author (the civil servant and social planning advocate W.F. Geyl) builds up a storyline which presents the neighbourhood unit as the inevitable and ultimate response to the historical developments of industrialisation and urbanization in the Netherlands and Rotterdam. The downsides of industrial production and metropolitan scale had fostered an awareness of the loss of community, urban citizenship and social qualities that would be restored within the framework of the neighbourhood, *de wijk*.<sup>15</sup> The neighbourhood unit became highly attractive to various stakeholders in Rotterdam's redevelopment. One group of community-building advocates, united in the *Rotterdamsche Gemeenschap* (Rotterdam Community) almost entirely grafted its activism on the neighbourhood unit, again vesting it with the capacities to arrest the waning of metropolitan life:

One of the central ideas of the Rotterdamsche Gemeenschap is the neighborhood unit. In our conversations, we started from the assumption that the modern big city confronts man with a number of difficulties and dangers which can only be suppressed successfully within smaller units such as neighborhoods. The loss of community ties, the waning and atomisation of modern man must be resisted.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> W.F. Geyl, *Wij en de wijkgedachte* (Utrecht: V en S, 1946).

<sup>16</sup> N.N., *Wat wil de Rotterdamsche gemeenschap?* (Rotterdam: N.N. 1944), 20.

Along the lines of gender, the other spheres of social life were similarly put to the fore in a range of other publications, again most often directly aimed at the population of Rotterdam. To furbish and decorate the new family dwellings, the housewives were induced to go out shopping in the soon-to-be built shopping precincts, of which *De Lijnbaan* (which opened in 1953) would become the paragon. The male head of the household was to participate in the reconstruction of the city through hard labour in the local (building) industry or the port.

### ***Social misfits and 'unofficial' communities***

The inclusionist promises underlying the New Jerusalemist narrative tended to conceal the exclusionist effects of post-Blitz reconstruction practices. In essence, the ambitions of post-war Rotterdam implied the displacement of residents from the city centre – the new exclusive locus for shopping, trade, finance and administration, spaces not intended for living –, and the regeneration of the nuclear family within the setting of the neighbourhood unit as the building block of a socialised, (re)productive and affluent urban community.

Not all inhabitants were of course eligible to participate in this imagined trajectory of urban life. Many of the original residents of the old inner city did not meet the requirements of the propagated form of urban citizenship. This group experienced the bombardment as the first of a series of traumas. After destruction came displacement, after displacement came a life permanently detached from the New Jerusalem in the making. The most noticeable environment where this group of urbanites ended up were the so called emergency villages, enclaves of temporary dwellings at the urban fringes which were built to provide shelter for the homeless victims of the Blitz.

From as early as the spring of 1940 onwards, seven emergency villages were built at the city borders. They were designed to last for about five years, and its inhabitants had to

move to the new neighbourhoods once completed – at least this was the intention. However, these emergency villages were about to have life spans varying from 20 to over 60 years. Well over 2000 of such ‘temporary dwellings’ were built during the war.

The emergency villagers increasingly narrated their own tale of a post-Blitz urban community. Its narrators were not allied to the official institutions of post-war reconstruction and redevelopment. Nor did they adhere to the axioms of the New Jerusalemists. Its media were not the widely distributed propaganda texts or information brochures, sanctioned or commissioned by the (local) planning authorities. Instead, it was the ostracized people themselves who gave expression to a nostalgia – and responded to the perceived negation of a recent past – which was lacking in the tale of the New Jerusalem. They found their stages in pavilions and locally circulated newsletters and bulletins. One might argue the New Jerusalemist narrative buried a past that still had psychological value to at least the villagers.

Initially, many (male) inhabitants of the emergency village were involved in the actual physical displacement of their environments. Many low-skilled men were hired as rubble removers. The rubble from the inner city was used to elevate and level the land on which some of the emergency villages were built. Some materials were reused in the construction of temporary dwellings. The rubble became a material reminder of the past and the future. This provoked a community narrative that capitalised on loss and continuity in the same breath: the inner city was lost forever, but its people and bricks had found a different location – albeit in a rather different configuration.

Already during the war, the emergency villages became clear spatial markers of alleged moral decay and seclusion – the loci where the unwanted ‘slummers’ of the destroyed inner city ended up. An above average amount of people in the emergency villages were branded anti-social by the reconstruction authorities and in popular discourse. Being subjected to an all-encompassing scheme of social re-education in one case (in the so-called

*Noorderkanaalwegcomplex* or *Drentsedorp*), alleged anti-social inhabitants had much direct contact with social workers, housing inspectors, police officials, and other supervisors. These encounters fostered a strong anti-authoritative attitude that intermingled with collective images of otherness and social exclusion that also affected the other emergency villages where conditions were significantly better.<sup>17</sup>

Rogier van Aerde's novel of 1951 (*Nooddorp*) about the emergency villages only confirmed existing biases: "Nobody prided themselves on them [the emergency dwellings, SC], and that is why they were put at the outer fringes of the city [...] It looked like a concentration camp, sadly lying a few hundred meters off the road. Long rows of low, filthy living barracks – like prisoners' sheds. Only the barbed wire and the watching towers with machine guns were lacking [...]." <sup>18</sup>

Van Aerde's representation of the inhabitants of this 'camp' reflects the stigma attached to the *Noorderkanaalwegcomplex* – the village that was gradually turned into an experiment with repressive social work and re-education during the war – in particular. He clearly described the inevitable stigma of the villagers:

They were marked by the single fact that they lived there [in the emergency village, SC]. An employer hesitated to hire a labourer coming from the village.

A landlord would not have any villagers amongst his tenants. It was a bad certificate everywhere, a label that was equally stuck on all, no matter how much they differed among themselves. Many felt it was a hurtful injustice

imposed upon them. Some were encouraged by that and worked themselves up.

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<sup>17</sup> For this see the first-hand account by the former inhabitant of the *Noorderkanaalwegcomplex*, Alexander Roodbol: Alexander Roodbol, *Wij 'a-socialen': Het lot van honderden Rotterdammers (1940-1960)* (unpublished memoirs, 1984).

<sup>18</sup> Rogier van Aerde, *Het Nooddorp* (Utrecht: Bruna, 1951), 5-6.

Others gave up entirely. Immense sums of money were spent on the village – but one could hardly notice.<sup>19</sup>

In the lengthy reports about the results of the social work one finds similar descriptions:

[...] one sees a mentality among these families which is aimed at the exploitation of social amenities and the perpetuation of life in straitened circumstances. In most cases, the men are uneducated stevedores, while the women are spineless, garrulous creatures negligent of their duties and with no inclination whatever to look after their houses or families.<sup>20</sup>

Immediately after the war, the perceived worst cases were deported to asylum camps in the Northern part of the Netherlands – by force. This story of the ‘social misfits’ of the *Noorderkanaalweg* has long been overshadowed by the Messianic purport of the New Jerusalemist discourse. Only rather recently, journalists and former inhabitants have written about the atrocities of deportation and social exclusion in post-Blitz Rotterdam.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Van Aerde 7.

<sup>20</sup>Adrianne Dercksen and Loes Verplanke, *Geschiedenis van de onmaatschappelijkheidsbestrijding in Nederland, 1914-1970* (Meppel: Boom, 1997), 77.

<sup>21</sup>Dick Rackwitz, *Van puindorp tot tuindorp: Rotterdamse noodwoningcomplexen als object van beleid en beschavingsarbeid, 1940-1970* (Rotterdam: MA thesis Open University, 1998); Ben Maandag and Tonny van der Mee, *De ‘asocialen’: Heropvoeding in Drentse kampen* (Rotterdam: Donker, 2005); Rein Wolters, *Verdwenen Rotterdamse nooddorpen: Herinneringen aan het Gelderse, Utrechtse, Drentse en Brabantse Dorp* (Zaltbommel: Uitgeverij Aprilis, 2004); Frits Baarda, *Rotterdam 14 mei 1940. De ooggetuigen, de foto's* (Bussum: Uitgeverij THOTH, 2015).



Whereas the *Noorderkanaalwegcomplex* was demolished by the end of the war, most other emergency villages formed long-term communities whose members did not want to leave their premises. Community life was thriving in the emergency villages from the late 1940s onwards. The most feasible expression was the foundation of numerous formal and informal voluntary associations relating to gardening, football, playground or needlework. Particularly in the so-called *Geldersedorp*, one of the emergency villages that contained higher quality dwellings, a blossoming youth centre was established by the orthodox-protestant church.<sup>22</sup>

Social isolationism was often crafted as part of narrative strategy. The shared experience of being bombed, displaced and isolated, the thin walls and limited privacy of their alleged temporary dwellings, tapped into a collective sense of exclusion in isolation. Being a misfit became a self-proclaimed honorary sobriquet. At one of the many emergency village reunions that have been organised since the 1970s, one former inhabitant was recorded saying:

We were living in poverty, but everyone helped each other out. A cup of sugar? The neighbour would give it [...] Outside the village we found no support. The children from Blijdorp [an adjoining, richer, permanent neighbourhood, SC] were not allowed to play with us. Like as if we consciously decided to have our houses bombed.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Rackwitsz 19-22.

<sup>23</sup>*Maassluise Courant – De Schakel*, 13 December 2007.

Social surveys, undertaken by the municipality and social scientists, as well as charity organisations in the 1950s and 1960s, learnt that villagers hardly interacted with people from the adjoining permanent neighbourhoods and vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

This alternative narrative of community-building and urban place-making was of a radically different kind than the New Jerusalemism. The neighbourhood unit was non-existent, many villagers were unemployed, single or divorced; generally speaking, they were too poor to indulge in consumerism, and many households did not coincide with the desired ideal of nuclear family. Their community was certainly not the one envisaged by the planners. Their places were limited to emergency villages in the outer city margins.

The burden of the social odium that was projected onto most of the emergency villagers, spurred an inward discourse of seclusion. Their new social environment, the emergency village, was a continuous reminder of what was lost – their inner city biotope with its vibrant street life and social pluralism – and what was retained – a perceived old-fashioned neighbourliness which was unaffected by the agendas of social monism – or at least the mitigation of social heterogeneity – imposed by the reconstruction authorities. In the emergency villages, thus, a whole different kind of post-Blitz Rotterdam was narrated, a Rotterdam that allowed for the commemoration of what was lost during those traumatising days in May 1940.

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<sup>24</sup> Rotterdam City Archive, Collection J. Simonse – emergency villages, reports, theses and memorandums about the emergency villages in Rotterdam 1940-1970.

## *Conclusion*

Narratives about Rotterdam as a New Jerusalem – a city arising from the smouldering debris which would epitomise the demands and needs of the modern era – were composed by planners and administrators who were at the heart of public reconstruction authorities, both at the local and the national level. The separation of the functions of urban space (housing, commerce, leisure and industry) entailed the displacement of residents from the inner city to the fringes of Rotterdam. As such, the top-down interventionist agenda of reconstruction was a necessary condition for alternative narrations of redevelopment – of the old city and its social realities – to emerge. Both narratives, as two sides of the same coin, in a way share the same plot: the perseverance of the people of Rotterdam in an urban environment which seems to continuously suffer from and is able to adapt to endogenous change, be it bombs and German occupation, or, in the case of emergency villages, the imposition of interventionist planning practices.

However, whereas the New Jerusalemists linked this attitude to a continuous mode of regeneration of socio-spatial relations along the lines of a conception of a family-based community, the inhabitants of the emergency villages connected messages of resurrection to their own personal lives, particularly to the restoration of some form of local belonging. The rather swift adherence of most of the inhabitants to their temporary homes has to be explained by yet another significant personal (mostly male) experience. Many of the homeless people, due to the bombardments, engaged in the clearance of debris in the inner city. Saliently, most of the materials were re-used in the construction of their new homes. As such, homeless rubble cleaners directly contributed to the restoration of their own family life and were able to share the experience of having cleaned up the debris of their former homes, which had provided the material for building their new temporary dwellings.. In short, the New Jerusalemist narrative envisaged a whole new city, whereas the villagers narrated their own

micro-tale of reconstruction, which was irreconcilable with the new modernist cityscape that was being realised a few kilometers away, in their former living areas. To the New Jerusalemists, destruction was a blessing in disguise. The Blitz created an enormous window of opportunity to embark on the realisation of the perfectly planned urban society. Urban space had to be divided functionally into suburban residential zones, an inner city life determined by shopping, trading and entertainment, and economic productivity centring on the port area. The social fabric had to be woven around the nuclear family, which had to be rooted in neighbourhood units providing all the necessary amenities. Narratives ensuing from politico-administrative and town planning practices, claimed an inclusive conception of post-war Rotterdam. However, at the same instance, a group of people living in the enclaves at the city's ends was subjected to governmentalities that framed these people into a category ineligible for the new city; they were the social misfits.

To the villagers, reconstruction meant restoring the social bonds that had given meaning to their urban lives before the war. Together with the remnants of the old city (i.e. rubble), they were displaced to isolated and well-supervised suburban environments. A grassroots process of community-building seemed to re-invoke the disrupted pre-war social fabric. However, the popular narratives were only echoed within the spatial confines of these temporary settlements, and referred to the new Rotterdam as 'the other world'. Through the materiality of their surroundings, burgeoning associational life and the growing resistance to top-down interventions into their communities, they were able to forge narrative representations in which poverty, stigmatisation and exclusion were represented as the generic downsides of post-war life, but comradeship, public spirit and social cohesion – ironically the same tropes employed by the New Jerusalemists at large – were proudly described by the narrators as the idiosyncratic features of 'their' post-war Rotterdam.

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